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Corzine going to Sudan and Iraq to assess conditions

Friday, April 29, 2005

BY DONNA DE LA CRUZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Jon Corzine said yesterday that he plans to travel to Sudan and Iraq this weekend to see firsthand the humanitarian conditions in the two countries.

This will be the second trip to both countries Corzine has taken since being elected senator in 2000. Corzine (D-N.J.) planned to visit with some of the 1,700 New Jersey National Guard members in Iraq.

The senator's trip to Sudan represents his interest in the region. Last week Corzine said people cannot stand on the sidelines while a genocide is taking place in the country's Darfur region.

"People from outside Sudan need to visit and report back and raise issues and create a voice for those that are displaced and who are under attack," Corzine said in a conference call with reporters. "This issue has gotten enough attention to have our secretary of state declare a genocide after the House and Senate did that."

Corzine, along with Republican Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas, has spearheaded measures regarding Darfur in the Senate. Corzine's Darfur Accountability Act calls for sanctions against Sudan and the establishment of a special presidential envoy to the region.

The Darfur conflict began after two non-Arab rebel groups took up arms against the Arab-dominated government in February 2003 to win more political and economic rights for the region's African tribes. Sudan's government is accused of responding by backing the Janjaweed militia in a campaign of wide-scale abuses, including rape and killings, against Sudanese of African origin. The government denies backing the Janjaweed.

The United Nations has called Darfur the world's worst humanitarian crisis. An estimated 180,000 people have died in the upheaval and about 2 million others have been displaced since the conflict began.

Corzine said he hoped to get a visa to travel to Sudan, but if not, he would go to eastern Chad and visit with Sudanese refugees there. When Corzine traveled to Sudan last summer, he did not get a visa to enter the country until hours before he left the United States.

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After the Sudan trip, Corzine said he would spend a day in Jordan in preparation for going to Baghdad, where he hoped to visit with New Jersey soldiers and Iraqi political leaders.

Corzine expected to leave on his trip this weekend after the Senate recesses until the week of May 9.



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